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**THE CIVILIZATIONAL APPROACH TO STUDYING
THE PHENOMENON OF RUSSIAN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY CHARITY**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the issue of studying Russian pre-revolutionary charity as one of the phenomena in the history of Russia, which evolution largely determined the specifics of its culture and the hierarchy of social values. It is shown that relying on the civilizational approach, which suggests that culture can be considered as a social way of human activity and society, charity must be studied as a particular sociocultural phenomenon. In its evolution charity went from being proclaimed a moral obligation by the church and gaining recognition by the state as one of the mechanisms for stabilizing social relations in the context of socioeconomic inequality to a cultural tradition that significantly contributed to the emergence and growth of legal forms of civic activity in a country with an autocratic nature of power.

Keywords

Pre-revolutionary Russia – Charity – Civilizational analysis – Culture – Society

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Introduction

The return of Russia to a market economy naturally led to the growth of social stratification and put the authorities and society in need of reviving charity in the country as the most important institution of social assistance that meets the traditions and demands of our sociocultural evolution. The demand for historical experience of organizing social assistance through various forms of charity in a new sociopolitical practice, as well as the development of social activity as its important component, alongside a serious scientific request for the development of knowledge about Russian charity, actualize the appeal to the problem of using the civilizational approach to studying the history of charity. In her work "Theoretical-methodological and historiographical aspects of the phenomenon of Russian charity", T.Ye. Pokotilova substantiated the legitimacy and necessity of resorting to the study of pre-revolutionary Russian charity as a special sociocultural phenomenon that went from being proclaimed a moral obligation by the church, gaining recognition by the state as one of the mechanisms for stabilizing social relations in the context of socioeconomic inequality to a cultural tradition that significantly contributed to the emergence and growth of legal forms of civic activity in a country with an autocratic nature of power. This fact, in turn, dictates the need to appeal to the possibilities of the civilizational analysis in order to study charity as one of those phenomena in Russian history, which evolution largely determined the specificity of our culture and the hierarchy of our social values. Moreover, the explanatory possibilities of the civilizational approach correspond to the development course of modern Russia towards the preservation of national and cultural identity against the background of the process of globalization and westernization actively promoted by the West in recent decades.

Research methods

It is commonly known that the civilizational approach implies that culture is, *inter alia*, a social mode of activity of man and society. It is also well known that until recently in the sociological approach, which prevailed throughout the world, culture was generally regarded as an epiphenomenon of the social. Turning to the possibilities of the civilizational approach provides a unique opportunity to seek explanations for social changes in cultural motivation, which is why culture in modern social science more and more often appears to be one of the most important engines for social development.

Discussion and research results

Human nature in its specificity, on the one hand, made a human an insufficient creature, and, on the other, a creative being¹. It is human natural insufficiency that makes a human a creative being. In order to eliminate this insufficiency, to compensate for the missing abilities, a person produces culture. That is, culture has become an element of human adaptation to nature and its subjugation under the conditions when the survival of a person who is deprived of the necessary programs for reacting to the external environment is not guaranteed by nature itself. A human is forced to analyze his/her environment, to highlight elements that are necessary to satisfy his/her instinctive needs. As a result, what we now call the cultural environment has gradually emerged. That is, culture was necessary for human society from the first steps of its existence because the type of organization of collective life, which was encoded in the gene pool of the animal world, ceased to function in the life of the first human populations.

¹ L. G. Ionin. The sociology of culture (Moscow: Logos, 1996).

In culture understood as integrity, there are no "extra" elements. "Everywhere there is the same ignorant and stupid misunderstanding that every feature of culture, every custom and belief has a particular value, fulfills a social function and has a positive biological value. From a biological point of view, traditions are a form of collective adaptation of a community to its environment. If the tradition is destroyed, the social organism will be deprived of its protective cover and doomed to slow inevitable death!"². That is why charity, as a phenomenon with a centuries-long history, can be safely considered an element of culture, pointing out one of the characteristics of a lifestyle inherent in society throughout its development.

We know neither a single era nor a single country where the obligation to render assistance to the weak and poor is not recognized. Without searching for a large number of manifestations of "actions based on a sense of friendliness, aimed at helping weak members of society..."³ within primitive culture, we, nevertheless, should note that exactly at this stage history, when a person is affirmed as a biosocial being, a dichotomy arises in the rules of human behavior, which are determined by life itself, the need for its preservation, development and improvement. It is precisely these rules of behavior that formed the basis of morality and determined its division, according to some philosophers, primarily into individual and social morality⁴.

The instinct of human satisfaction in the needs of food, protection, and self-preservation makes the basis for individual morality, whereas social morality is based on the instinct of protection and preservation of the genus. Of course, the instinct of satisfying one's own needs is more ancient and stronger, but in view of the fact that "the actions of an individual aimed exclusively at improving his/her personal life, turn out to be insufficient not only for the development of social life, but even for his/her persona life", which is proved by the irreversible folding of society in primitiveness. The actions of a person inevitably go beyond his/her own life and are directed to the development of life of the social group to which he/she belongs. Primitive man already had a dual motivation for action: on the one hand, to preserve own biological self as a separate individual, and, on the other hand, as a member of society meaning to bear all the burdens and make the sacrifices required by public interests in order to survive and enjoy all the benefits of living in society. This can be called a regular pattern because human individual existence is so limited in all respects that it needs to be expanded through joining groups that are becoming more and more extensive over time, to which a person is attached through such bonds that can be broken or weakened, for the most part, only for one's own good.

The history of charity's emergence, its formation and development as a sociocultural phenomenon is largely the result and evidence of a combination, different in percentage, depending on the stage of the development of human society, manifestations of both individual and social morality. Indeed, in a broad sense, it is "a system of actions based on a sense of friendliness aimed at helping weak members of society who, for some reason, are deprived of the opportunity to provide themselves with a minimal means of survival"⁵. The content of individual morality is a person's desire for benefits, allowing

² S. A. Tokarev, *The history of foreign ethnography* (Moscow: 1978), 245-246.

³ S. N. Yuzhakova y P. N. Milyukov, *The great encyclopedia Vol: 3* (Saint Petersburg, 1896), 293.

⁴ K. Annenkov. Individual and social ethics and their bases. *The Bulletin of Europe*, num 4 (1906): 569.

⁵ S. N. Yuzhakova y P.N. Milyukov. *The great encyclopedia...*

better use of life, that is, for health, happiness, knowledge of the truth, satisfaction of a sense of grace, etc. However, on the other hand, these benefits include avoiding suffering and misfortunes that shorten life or make it difficult. To achieve the goal of social morality – general happiness – it is necessary to maintain good, honest and useful relationships with people, as well as to fulfill mutual assistance responsibilities in the fight against life difficulties. It is obvious that exactly the above factors form the motivational basis for a system of actions to combat the need and to provide support for weak members of society.

In order to survive people learned to create a "special type of objective reality"⁶ – various associations, unions, organizations, the activities of which were provided not by innate but acquired instincts, due to life practice, knowledge, skills, and beliefs, i.e., culture. Taking into account the fact that organizations and institutions are "a certain form of human relations" and "a form of objectification of the very activity of people", it is possible to conclude that the socio-organizational culture, appearing to be equal to society, covers whole public life, and fully forms public relations. In addition, changes in the socially organized objectivity of culture depend on the dynamics of social relations formed by it, so the development of this aspect of culture is a process determined by the changing state of social relations. This socio-organizational layer of culture has an extremely important feature – heterogeneity. This is due to the fact that different communities need not only common and identical but also very different ways of organizing their activities, which leads to the diversity of socio-organizational culture in structures existing simultaneously. At the same time, there is an inverse effect of the divergence of the fundamental positions of cultural entities and their confrontation on the social structure, which can be either strengthened or loosened by cultural processes contributing to the preservation of culture and preparing its revolutionary overthrow. The complication of society, its institutions and structures causes the adequate development of all components of culture which begin to independently and originally influence both the further development of society and culture itself.

As far as charity is concerned, as social relations become more complex, its sociocultural origin gives it the status of an object of relationships between the main links of social structure throughout social history. There is an understanding of a social phenomenon as "a social connection that has a psychic nature and is realized in the consciousness of the individual going beyond it in content and duration at the same time"⁷. This definition implies the following classification of acts of human behavior or actions caused by various mental experiences, proposed by P. A. Sorokin⁸: 1. "permissible-due", 2. "voluntary" or "recommended", 3. "forbidden" or "unlawful". Accordingly, the reactions they cause (social connections) are also divided into three categories. In this classification, we are interested in all three pairs of acts and in the reactions they cause. "Permissible-due" acts are acts that correspond to representations of "proper" behavior (acts of exercising rights or acts of fulfilling duties) that cause a "permissible-due" reaction. "Recommended" acts do not contradict person's ideas about permissible and proper behavior but represent an excess over a necessary minimum of "good" behavior, which is permissible and proper behavior, and therefore always desirable causing a reaction of the service award. Finally, "forbidden" or "unacceptable" acts cause an experience of disgust and repulsion to this form of behavior as a reaction.

⁶ M.S. Kagan, *The philosophy of culture* (Saint Petersburg: 1996), 96.

⁷ P. A. Sorokin, *Human. Civilization. Society* (Moscow: Vysshaya shkola, 1992), 39.

⁸ P. A. Sorokin, *Human. Civilization. Society...*

The Old Russian State was brought to life as a social institution to regulate relations arising from performing the indicated acts in society and reactions to them. Due to the weakness and underdevelopment of state structures in the early stages of the state building and to religious nature of the public worldview, the Old Russian State was forced to share part of its functions, including the function of regulation in the area of what is permitted, due and unapproved, with the Orthodox Church. As for the implementation of the moral-ethical function, which includes relations regarding acts recommended as excessively positive, which are a kind of moral luxury, the church in the early feudal state received a complete monopoly on it. Therefore, the Christian Church that was the bearer of the philosophy of mercy borrowed from ancient culture and professionally developed and adapted to the interests of the state became a monopolist in the field of charity for a long time.

In the X-XVI centuries, the Russian Orthodox Church became responsible for the work of practical charity in the country through the cultivation of moral impulses to charity by promoting the teachings of love and mercy, educating the congregation by means of specific examples of one's own, personal "kindness". The church also arranged activities to take care of those in need through church structures with the help of tithing, its own finances and numerous donations. Moreover, during the final stage of the unification of Russian lands and the emergence of Russian autocracy, the church's propaganda thesis about the need to take care of one's neighbor and give alms, the need bequeathed by God, became one of the decisive arguments in defending its right to property both in internal church disputes about the "right church" and in heated rivalry with secular power for the fullness and scope of power. Active promotion of the idea of caring for the poor as a determining factor in the domestic beneficence led to the strengthening of the patriarchal thesis about the charitable nature of poverty in the Russian public consciousness.

Since the Stoglav Council (church council) in 1551, secular tendencies in organizing care for those in need have been traced in Russia, which is associated with the strengthening of the state's position as a social institution and its desire to overcome the exorbitant growth of poverty in the context of the gradual complication of socio-economic relations. It resulted, among other reasons, from the "improper development" of charity in the form, for the most part, the so-called manual alms encouraged by the religious doctrine of the care for the poor. The nature of the arising state in many respects predetermined the content of the emerging state policy in the field of care for the needy. Peter I who gave the beneficent process an original, police-state character started the repressions against the poor. Simultaneously, the emperor tried to implement a certain system of measures to organize state charity. It had become possible only by 1775 during the reign of Catherine II in the form of the creation of a system of Orders of public charity.

These orders were to manage the assistance to those in need through public charity institutions on the basis of state-determined capital: almshouses, orphanages, work houses, hospitals and mental health units. The centralization of the management of beneficence, along with the creation of special local bodies for charity, was only part of the designated system; it also implied a complete condemnation and prohibition of begging, determination of the range of measures and norms of charity by the state, obligations for charity in rural areas and cities, forced labor of beggars who were able to work. The realization of the idea of charity as a branch of public administration, the subordination of confessional charity to the patronage of the state with the elimination of common institutions of beneficence in the form of monastic and parish assistance, despite the

relative independence of the Orders of public charity and some funding, led to the formation of a fairly clear structure of aid institutions but did not satisfy the needs in such assistance. The backward economy, the bureaucratization of all aspects of life, the isolation of society from the solution of state and any other problems prevented the determined system of beneficence from being efficient. It was only the introduction of a social element in the cause of organized charity that "could breathe life into it". But the attitude towards subjects as passive executors of the authorities' orders led to the separation of social activity from state activity in a political regime based on a system of involuntary associations (estate, community and others).

The publication in 1782 of the Charter of the Deanery, which under certain conditions allowed the creation of public organizations, along with Catherine's attempt to turn the Orders of public administration into representative institutions became the evidence of a certain understanding of the importance of public initiative by the "enlightened" monarchs, as well as the educational policy of Alexander I. In the sphere of charity, it was manifested in the organization and energetic work of institutions "governed on special terms" (Imperial Philanthropic Society, the Department of Institutions of the Empress Maria Fyodorovna and others of semi-public character), and in the birth of the first public charitable organizations.

Under the capitalization of the economy and the monopoly of absolute power in political activity, the sphere of charity became an area where the trend of a regular activation of public life could be implemented positively for the state with the administrative-police regime in acceptable forms and with the desired effect. This is precisely the explanation of the focus of the emerged zemstvo and city self-government bodies on solving the problems in healthcare, public education and social assistance. The zemstvo assistance system, as including all the, despite the lack of real independence of the zemstvos and city public administrations, of sufficient funds, and the effect of outdated charity legislation (based on the principle of social class charity), turned out to be much more effective than ordered, and even less so, class charity. In provinces where the Orders of public charity were still in force by 1900, charity expenses averaged 8,125 rubles a year per province, and in zemstvo provinces the expenses were 45,438 rubles a year (and taking into account the costs of preventive and other assistance to those in need – 104,044 rubles a year)⁹.

Private charity, which had a long and vivid tradition in the history of Russia, had acquired a large scale by the second half of the XIX century due to the ongoing social processes. Personal charity resulted from religious motives, compassion, the popularity of the idea of public prestige, the desire of philanthropists to realize their citizenship in the forms acceptable by the regime. Organized charity was manifested the creation and diverse activities of a large number of charitable societies of various types. The history and results of the work of these societies, despite the outdated legislation on the organization of assistance to those in need, testifies both to its scope and to the real desire of the members of these societies to be useful. By the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, three main types of such societies had been distinguished based on the charitable tasks they implement. These were societies that assisted in its various forms and types, societies dedicated to the organization and maintenance of any charitable institution, societies

⁹ Charity in Russia, Saint Petersburg, 1907, Vol. 1 y T. Ye. Pokotoliva. Theoretical-methodological and historiographical aspects of the phenomenon of Russian charity (Stavropol: Petropolis, 1998).

created for the purpose of providing charitable assistance in a single form. By 1902, the number of organizations of the first type had only amounted to 2,634 units in the country (55.3% of all charitable societies). They had a capital of 82,029,718 rubles and real estate, the value of which was estimated at 22,870,865 rubles¹⁰. Despite the permissive nature of establishing charitable societies and institutions in Russia, the strict regulation of their activities predetermined by the nature of the political system, as well as the lack of unity in views on the essence and procedures of organizing charitable assistance in society itself significantly hampered its development. Members of public charitable organizations not only made a real and invaluable contribution to helping many categories of people in need but also went through a serious school of civil formation on the path of collective actions in the non-political sphere.

Conclusion

Charity is a sociocultural phenomenon that appeared in Russia, as elsewhere, as a result of a person's desire for self-preservation and for stability in public relations. Under the influence of the specificity of Orthodoxy, the well-known legislative and administrative activities of the Russian state and the peculiarities of the national character, it had a vivid and long history based on a strong tradition. At the same time, unfortunately, the participants in the charity practice of pre-revolutionary Russia were not able to fully realize its main function – the function of one of the “drive belts” of the stabilization mechanism – under serious and rapidly deepening social inequality. First of all, this was resulted from the police-bureaucratic nature of the state, the conservatism of its institutions and the lack of legal consciousness in Russian society. Nevertheless, the morality of the subject of research, as well as the possibility of using the traditions of Russian pre-revolutionary philanthropy in modern democratic Russia, allows talking about the need to develop the phenomenon of Russian philanthropy in Russian social science through the possibilities of the civilizational analysis.

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